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# LUDVIG HOLBERG

THE FOUNDER OF NORWEGIAN LITERATURE  
AND AN OXFORD STUDENT

BY

S. C. HAMMER, M.A.

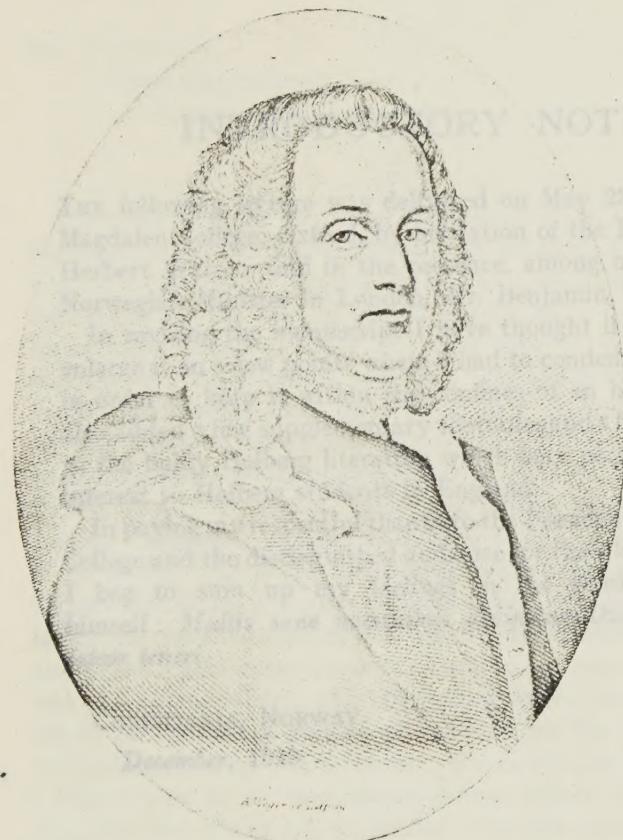


LUDVIG  
OXFORD  
B. H. BLACKWELL, BROAD STREET

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LUDVIG HOLBERG



## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE following lecture was delivered on May 23rd, 1919, at Magdalen College, Oxford, by invitation of the President, Sir Herbert Warren, and in the presence, among others, of the Norwegian Minister in London, Mr. Benjamin Vogt.

In revising the manuscript I have thought it necessary to enlarge it on a few points where I had to condense the lecture in order to keep it within the confines of an hour. I have also added a few supplementary footnotes and a brief reference to the bulky Holberg literature which may perhaps prove of interest to Holberg students in England.

In paying my respectful thanks to the President of Magdalen College and the distinguished audience for their kind reception I beg to sum up my feelings in the words of Holberg himself: *Multis sane nominibus devinctum Oxoniensibus me fateor teneri.*

S. C. H.

CHRISTIANIA, NORWAY.

December, 1919.



## LUDVIG HOLBERG

MR. PRESIDENT,  
YOUR EXCELLENCY,  
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

### I.

I propose to speak to you about my countryman, Ludvig Holberg, the most famous Norwegian student whose name was ever entered on the records of this University. If this had not been the case, I should hardly have ventured to ascend this platform, for I feel that here, if anywhere, it must be an indispensable condition that the subject should match the place. For just as Oxford is not primarily an institution of education, but through its traditions, its companionships, its achievements, the very embodiment of British genius, British chivalry and British aspirations, so Ludvig Holberg is, indeed, no author in the ordinary sense of the word. He is the founder of modern Norwegian and Danish literature, the greatest playwright, the first critical historian, the most human and most broad-minded moralist and philosopher of two nations; a man whose constant work was one of educating; who revolutionised the conception of life in two kingdoms and paved the way for the intellectual and political liberty of the future. For all this, as I am going to show you, he is, next to his genius, highly indebted to England and, above all, to Oxford. To this place he made his way when he quitted Norway 213 years ago, imbued with a deep and early sympathy for England; from this place he went to Copenhagen, the joint capital at that time of Denmark and Norway, enriched by assets of the highest importance to his life-work. I, therefore, want to thank you for the opportunity you have given me to pay a joint tribute to Oxford and Holberg.



Ludvig Holberg—*Ludovicus Holbergius, Norvegus*, as he signed his name in the Admission Index of the Bodleian Library—was born at Bergen, the present capital of Western Norway, on December 3rd, 1684. His father, who was a well-known officer in the Norwegian army, died when Lewis was an infant; his mother, when he was 10 years old. Lewis who was the youngest of twelve brothers and sisters, six of whom attained their majority, therefore very early became acquainted with the sterner aspects of life and grew up a lonely boy, deprived of the tender care of a parental home. It was at that time the custom in Norway to give pay to sons of officers and to initiate them at an early age in military tactics, the salaries they got being used to defray the expenses of their education. These petty officers were called corporals, and Lewis was now promptly appointed corporal in the "Upland Regiment," far away from his native town, in one of the midland districts.

This was a rather curious beginning for a man so decidedly anti-militarist as Holberg was throughout his life. In his autobiography, published in Latin in 1727,<sup>1</sup> he makes fun of the episode, describing his transformation from a petty officer into a professor of philosophy as "a sort of Ovidian metamorphosis which might expose me to the risk of being sent back from my professorial chair to the camp, if the authorities were disposed to question my qualifications."

Notwithstanding this, his appointment as petty officer was to become of importance to him. As soon as he got his commission he left Bergen for the midland counties—a remarkable journey at that time, by sea and land, through a great part of West and Mid Norway—until he finally arrived at the Fron Vicarage, one of the finest places in the valley of Gudbrandsdalen and at present one of our most popular tourist districts. The vicar of Fron, who was his relation on his mother's side, soon discovered his remarkable abilities, his passion for literature, in which he had already made some

<sup>1</sup> *Epistola ad virum per illustrem.* An English translation of this work under the title of *Memoirs of Lewis Holberg, written by Himself in Latin, and now first translated into English*, was published in London (Hunt & Clarke), 1827.



trifling attempts, and last but not least, his gift for languages

The two years which Holberg subsequently spent at Fron have, until a quite recent date, been practically unnoticed by Holberg students, but it is easy to see that they form an interesting link in the chain of events connected with his life. His schooldays at Fron were not pleasant to him, for the assistant master, who had to take care of the boys, was rather inferior as a teacher. His Latin was bad, his views narrow and pedantic, his chief instrument of instruction the birch, of which he made assiduous application. Holberg, who rather early reacted instinctively and strongly to all strokes of spontaneousness, very soon conceived a deep dislike and contempt for these pedagogic methods, and his power of reflection made its combinations and conclusions. Latin and pedantry became to a certain extent synonymous notions to him, and it was to be one of his pleasures as a writer to record and hand over to derision the whole system of travestied learning which was one of the characteristic features of his age.

This was the negative aspect of his sojourn at the Fron Vicarage. Its positive aspect was the time he spent in the library of the vicarage, where, among a number of Greek and Latin classics, he also found several modern foreign books, including some Bibles in English and French, an English and a French dictionary, a French grammar, and an English reader, with colloquial sentences—rather a curious collection of books for a Norwegian inland county towards the end of the seventeenth century. These books, as far as we know, were the first specimens of English and French literature which he ever saw, but he was fascinated by them. They were to him messages from the great marvellous world hundreds of miles beyond the mountains by which he was surrounded. Do you wonder that he was longing and dreaming, silent and solitary as he was by disposition?

But he was not dreaming only. Being a quick observer of things surrounding him, we may infer that he was deeply impressed by the customs and manners of the peasants



among whom he lived, their cool, unobtrusive way of behaving themselves, their sound judgment, their manual cleverness, their traditions, songs and fairy tales, and last but not least, their dialect, with its peculiar words and phrases, so decidedly different from his own Bergen tongue and way of speaking. Indeed, numerous passages in his works are stamped by obvious reminiscences from his Fron sojourn.

After an absence which, in more respects than one, ripened him above his age, Holberg, in 1698, returned to Bergen, where he resumed his studies under conditions which did not please him at all. During his absence the grammar school of the city had been subjected to a thorough reform by an able manager, who was himself an ardent admirer of the classics. Accordingly, Latin more than ever became the chief subject of instruction, the command of the language being laboriously aimed at by means of disputationes which were at once linguistic exercises and a medium of theological and metaphysical fencing.

Holberg, who always felt himself alien to subtleties of this kind, was therefore quite agreeable when very soon after the heavy fire at Bergen in 1702, which stands out as one of the most remarkable events in the annals of the city, he was sent to the University of Copenhagen, where he passed his B.A. examination. He does not seem to have been favourably impressed in any particular degree either by the capital itself or by the conditions ruling at the University. Otherwise, in his reminiscences he would hardly have passed by his life as a student in absolute silence; on the other hand, Bergen, as she presented herself to him towards the end of 1702 after he had been away for some seven or eight months, was certainly no cheery place, being still under the gloom of the devastations of the fire. He therefore quite naturally availed himself of the earliest opportunity of getting away.

The two following years of his life, but for a short stay at Copenhagen, where he completed his theological studies and attained a high degree, he spent chiefly "in flogging his pupils and converting Norwegian boors." This is a humorous expression of his for the way in which he performed his duties



as a tutor to the children of the vicar at Voss—now one of the best-known districts on the Bergen-Christiania Railway—and occasionally replaced him in the pulpit. By his own saying he succeeded decidedly better as a preacher than as a tutor which, by the way, does not say very much, as he never excelled in either of these functions. The chief interest connected with his stay at Voss is the fact that it strengthened his early Fron recollections of the peasants.

We are entitled to infer from his famous *Description of Bergen*, which appeared thirty-five years later, that he has taken a special interest in Voss, and that he has studied the history and the topography of the district, and we hardly jump at conclusions in assuming that his popularity with the peasants was due, not to his sermons, but to the straightforward, unpretending way in which he approached them. He carried with him from Voss, as he had carried with him from Fron, favourable impressions of the Norwegian peasantry to the manly qualities of whom he often returns in his writings.

In 1704 Holberg set out on the first of the five famous journeys which he was to undertake to various parts of Europe within the next twenty-two years. I shall not spend many words on this particular journey beyond the fact that he visited West Germany and Holland, which at that time were under the spell of the operations on the Western Front, for, as you remember, we find ourselves at that time at the commencement of the Spanish War of Succession. It is sufficient to state that the journey lasted about a year, and that Holberg, in the meantime, had many chequered experiences; by way of example, that it is impossible for a man with literary talents to get on at Amsterdam, where, to use his own expression, "trade occupies every man's thoughts, where philosophy is at a discount, and where even men like Grotius and Salmasius have to give way to shipowners and merchants." He therefore ultimately had to return to Norway, arriving in an exhausted condition at Christianssand, where he was assisted by a friend, Mr. Brix, whom he happened to meet there. This friend kindly recommended Holberg to several of the principal inhabitants, and he very soon got a reputation



as a teacher, especially in French, although—as he learnt on a later occasion in Paris—his French was not so perfect as the natives of Christianssand seemed to think.

Unfortunately he very soon happened to raise the feminine world of the town against himself. Full of irony as he was, and “delighted with everything which had an air of novelty”—as he describes himself—he was greatly amused one day by coming across an anonymous pamphlet in which the author endeavoured to prove, by sixty-four arguments, that women have no soul. He promptly learned the chief arguments by heart, and took every opportunity “of broaching the paradox and of defending it with an earnestness proportioned to the zeal or indignation with which it was opposed.” Finally, of course, he had to submit and to renounce his heresy, after which peace was restored. Holberg, who was very musical, and played excellently on the flute, was subsequently introduced to some of the most respected families in the town, where he seems to have been very much appreciated. It will always be a matter of conjecture whether he contracted at Christianssand, however temporarily, what has been styled a “heart rheumatism”; but if so, the ladies of Christianssand have had their revenge; their descendants may still be proud of the tribute which Holberg in his auto-biography pays to the accomplishments of their great-great grandmothers.

In the spring of 1706 Holberg left Christianssand, embarking for England at Arendal, the well-known neighbouring town, conspicuous even in those days for its sea-faring reputation. I may, perhaps, in this connection, take leave to observe that I am a native of that town, and often, when a boy, sailing out in my boat to the mouth of the harbour, where it opens towards the horizon far away, or resting on one of the many islets during the wonderful nights of the Norwegian summer, waiting for the early fishing hours at sunrise, I would remind myself that these rocks and skerries outside of my native town were the last part of Norway on which Holberg looked back when, under the press of a fair wind, his swift barque carried him away to England, the fairyland of his westward dreams.



Adieu, adieu! my native shore  
 Fades o'er the water blue;  
 The night-winds sigh, the breakers roar,  
 And shrieks the wild sea mew.

It was Norway's "Childe Harold"—the most solitary figure in our cultural history—who was taking leave of his country, never to see her rugged shores and her magnificent inland sceneries again. There was, indeed, nothing poetical about him, for—as you know—the age was a decidedly prosaic one, and Holberg, later in life, confessed that up to the age of 30 "he would yawn when he heard the finest piece of poetry read to him." Yet, as we can see him from our present vantage ground, he was at that moment the embodiment of the genius of the Norwegian nation, which once more, as in the saga period, hoisted its sails for Western Europe, bold, eager of adventures, fascinated at the very thought of getting away.

## II.

I want to lay stress on the Norwegian origin and education of Holberg, on his stay among our peasantry in two characteristic parts of the country, and also on the fact that he was over 21 when he left Norway for ever. If these things were not indispensable for a fair conception of his lifework, I should certainly not have dwelt on them. Yet a few particulars are still wanted to give a finishing touch to his portrait.

He set out in life with a delicate figure and an extremely youthful appearance, but in return he was possessed of some solid, staunch qualities which moulded him into a first-rate character. From his mother, whose family is still numerously represented in Norway, he had inherited a sound realism which made him firmly resolved to get a position in life and to settle down comfortably on a fixed salary. From his father, of whose family no trace is left among us, he had inherited what has been called the itinerary element of his nature—



his passion for travelling, initiated by his early Fron journey, his eagerness to see foreign countries, to stroll about in the big cities, to pass along the high roads from one country into another, covering extraordinary distances—an energetic student, a haunter of libraries, always on the look-out for new books, but above anything else, always and everywhere, a keen observer of men and things, enriching himself with knowledge from the fresh, inexhaustible sources of life.

Besides this, he was a true son of Bergen, the most heterogeneous town of Norway—a sort of “Noah’s Ark,” according to his own expression—with a development of its own which, in the course of centuries, has made the natives of Bergen differ considerably in views and manners from the rest of their countrymen. Even in our days these differences still make themselves felt in some degree. All this you must bear in mind when you speak about Holberg. The remarkable influence exercised upon him by Bergen gives the clue to his personality—to his genius as a playwright, to his liberal views as an historian, to his clear, realistic reasoning as a philosopher. It is always Bergen, never Copenhagen, which is uppermost in his mind.

How excellently this young, highly-gifted Norwegian was prepared for a thorough appreciation of contemporary England!

During the forty-six years which had passed since the Restoration of 1660, England—as you will remember—had witnessed a period full of political and literary activity, but above all, remarkable for its prodigious advance in the field of science. This progress was, it is true, a matter of European rather than of English concern, but the inquiring spirit and the rationalist desire to get to the bottom of things which were the hallmarks of the age were in no country developed more strikingly than in England. Latin was still the language in which scientific works were written, but the Royal Society had already unfolded its national programme “of bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness as possible, and of preferring the language of artisans, countrymen and merchants to that of wits and scholars.”



The extraordinary events of the time also highly appealed to the receptive mind of Holberg. When he arrived at Oxford in the spring of 1706, in the company of his friend, Mr. Brix, England was in the midst of the Spanish War of Succession, of which—as we remember—he had got some experiences on his Dutch journey. During a sojourn of nearly two years, Holberg was a close observer of everything connected with the great war. It was not so easy at that time as during the recent Armageddon to get hold of the historical thread leading up to events and to explain the facts by way of arguments; but he was impressed by the dogged determination of the English in their heavy struggle against Louis XIV., and their unswerving belief in a victorious issue. He himself never doubted that they would win the war, thanks to their splendid resources no less than to the very principles for which they fought. In short, it is the prototype of the world's war by which we are confronted—the Spirit of the West, the representative of the political and intellectual liberty of the future struggling against absolutism and all the reactionary powers of the past.

As a matter of course, Holberg was a staunch pro-ally, and besides this, he was also highly interested in the political events of the day. The Union between England and Scotland which took place during his stay at Oxford, strikes him as one of the most important acts of statesmanship in any age—an event of far-reaching consequences—and he never gets tired of commenting upon it and of subjecting it to new investigations.

I do not presume to think that I can tell you anything new concerning the conditions ruling at this University at the commencement of the eighteenth century, but some brief particulars in connection with Holberg's stay are of interest and importance for a fair understanding of the moulding influence of Oxford upon his character and genius.

Throughout the seventeenth century an increasing number of students from Denmark and Norway had found their way to Oxford, “the most noble theatre and emporium to all good sciences,” to quote a contemporary writer. From 1602 to



1683 the famous *Liber Peregrinorum*, or Admission Index, shows a total of 112 names of Danish and Norwegian origin; during the next twenty years, up to 1708, their number was 60, of which 46 were Danes and 14 were Norwegians. These figures are interesting as an unmistakable proof of the growing intercourse between the Dano-Norwegian monarchy and England, which by this time had commenced to make itself decidedly felt in the field of commerce.

From the commencement of the eighteenth century London, the famous fire of which in 1666 had given a great impetus to the small timber ports of South-Eastern Norway, became a city of growing importance to our country. During their holidays the Norwegian Oxford students used to spend their time in London, where there was a numerous colony of Danes and Norwegians and a constant influx of seamen and merchants, especially from South Norway. It was not, therefore, altogether by chance that Holberg arrived in England. He sailed, in fact on the westward current of the time.

On their arrival at this University, April 18th, 1706, having covered their way from Gravesend to London, and from London to Oxford on foot, Holberg and his friend soon found out that their finances were at so low an ebb that before they could proceed with their studies they had to provide for their domestic necessities. Fortunately Oxford was no particularly expensive place at that time, £40 a year being sufficient to pull a man through, and Holberg was always very economical, and understood remarkably well the difficult art of making both ends meet. Yet their first months at Oxford were passed under very strained conditions until Mr. Brix succeeded in getting a supply of money from a banker in London. In the meantime, they had raised the necessary funds themselves by giving lessons in music and languages, and it is a characteristic evidence of Holberg's cleverness that, after the departure of his friend, which took place comparatively soon, he managed to study at Magdalen College for more than eighteen months, with no other money than that obtained through his lessons as master of languages and of the flute.

The more you try to sound the marvellous authorship of



Holberg the more you feel convinced of the importance of his stay at Oxford. It would require several lectures to trace the way in which his impressions and his experiences of Oxford have moulded him as an historian, as a playwright, as a philosopher and moralist. I can only tell you that he took with him from this place to Copenhagen and to the Dano-Norwegian community not only the conviction of his future mission, but practically the very seeds of what should ripen into one of the richest crops in the field of literature. If Macaulay had known Holberg he would have had to give a somewhat different turn to his famous sentence : "France has been the intermediary between England and Mankind." Holberg visited England twenty-five years before Voltaire and twenty-four years before Montesquieu, and brought back first hand views and impressions, sifted only through the medium of his unbiassed mind.

To put it briefly. Holberg has been the intermediary between England and the North.

At Oxford Holberg planned the work by which he started in literature in 1711 : *Introduction to the History of the European Kingdoms*,<sup>1</sup> containing a remarkable chapter on England and the English from the time of the Romans down to 1702, with quotations from various authors, among them Milton, William Camden, and Lord Clarendon. This work, against which many objections have been raised and, to a certain extent, not unjustly, nevertheless is stamped by the characteristic features of his genius, so familiar to all Holberg students—his original way of thinking, his contempt for all sorts of ostentatious learning blocking the way by irrelevant facts, his plain language—vigorous, manly, with a turn of its

<sup>1</sup> In 1733 Holberg published a brief "Synopsis" in Latin, partly based on this work. In 1755 the Synopsis was translated into English by Gregory Sharp, LL.D., Fellow of the Royal Society, the translation being dedicated to the then Prince of Wales, afterwards George III. (A second edition, "corrected and enlarged," appeared in 1758.) In 1787 a new revised English edition of the Synopsis was published by William Radcliffe, A.B., of Oriel College, Oxford. Both translators are unanimous in their praise of the original, Radcliffe describing it as a work which by its disposition and arrangement in the matter of history has been eminently useful to young students and is approved by the highest Orders of literature.



own—his sound judgment, and perhaps, above all, the generally fair way in which he arraigns his persons before the tribunal of history.

Summing up his impressions and reminiscences twenty years later, Holberg says in his autobiography: “*I confess that I have many reasons for considering myself under great obligations to the Oxonians.*”

This is no phrase of politeness. It is the opinion of a man whose correct and blameless demeanour, no less than his sincerity, his loyalty, and his intellectual abilities, had won him the appreciation of his professors and the friendship of his fellow-students. His English was excellent, and he does not conceal the fact that he is a bit proud of it. Indeed, it is somewhat of a sacrifice not to indulge in quotations from Holberg’s autobiography—particularly so at the point at which we find ourselves now—for his description of his stay at Oxford is highly attractive, not only from a literary but a human point of view. Altogether his autobiography is a curiously fascinating work, of which no one will repent making the acquaintance. It ought to reappear in a modern English translation.

### III.

After an interesting decade the importance of which to the development of Holberg’s genius cannot be over-rated we meet him in 1718 as Professor of Metaphysics in Copenhagen University. After having left Oxford in 1708 he had—to sum up the period as briefly as possible—spent his time in studies at home and in travels abroad. He never revisited England, but he lived and rooted in the English world of thought, and whether in Germany, in Paris, in Rome, or at Copenhagen, he studied and reasoned on the basis of his Oxford experiences. His principal work from this period, *Introduction to the Law of Nature and of Nations*, although little more than an abridgement of Pufendorf’s great work on the same subject, is interesting as a proof of his independent views and his patriotic ambitions as an historian.



It would be an exaggeration unworthy of the reserved way in which Holberg used to express himself, to say that he owed everything to England. He was certainly also highly indebted to France. Setting apart what he owes to Holland, Germany and Italy, I think we may square the debt by saying that while England moulded his character and gave the first impetus to his genius as an historian, France chiefly contributed to the unfolding of his genius as a humorous writer. He is the Molière of the North and, no doubt, one of the greatest dramatic authors ever born.

In 1719 Holberg's genius, which, until then, had kept strictly within the rules prescribed by his professorship, apparently cool and indifferent to the outside world, suddenly burst into a fit of laughter which resounded through the North. This was his immortal heroic poem, *Peder Paars*, which appeared in the autumn of 1719, and which marks nothing less than a new era in Norwegian and Danish literature.

*Peder Paars*, like Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, the only parallel in our literature, is written in verse. Ibsen's rhymes are stamped by his mastership of form, and move in shifting stanzas according to the requirements of the situation and the emotion they are intended to create. Holberg walks throughout his poem on the high-heeled Alexandrines of the age. *Peer Gynt* is the embodiment of the Norwegian soul—Norway, as seen from within. *Peder Paars* is the central gallery of contemporary Denmark, with all its queer figures—Denmark, as seen from without. That is why Holberg could never have written *Peder Paars* if he had been born and bred a Dane. He had to be an outsider to get the right perspective.

The gist of the poem is quickly told. *Peder Paars*, a plain Danish citizen of a provincial town, wants to visit his sweetheart at some other provincial town a few miles off. He has to go by sea, of course, for Denmark, as you know, is pre-eminently a country composed of isles, and, like Odysseus and Aeneas, he has some mighty enemies among the immortal gods who will not allow him to complete his very reasonable journey. He is shipwrecked and washed ashore with his



followers on Anholt, the very smallest of all Danish isles. His experiences in this place form the chief part of the poem, for in this little, out-of-the-way island Holberg gives us, as it were, contemporary Denmark in a nutshell. Finally, the goddess of love pities him; he succeeds in making his escape from Anholt, and arrives subsequently at Jutland, where he has another series of remarkable experiences. Like Peer Gynt, he is put into a mad-house, but some time afterwards he is released and is escorted in triumph out of town. The last glimpse we get of him is where he is made a soldier and has to strip himself of all he is possessed of in order to be set free and become a civilian again. Here the poem ends abruptly, unfinished, as if the author has got tired; but the torso stands out as the work of a genius, and for two centuries it has stood the test of time and towers still as one of the most imposing works of fiction in Northern literature.

Holberg had a double purpose with *Peder Paars*. By the form he chose he intended to aim a decisive blow at the learned apparatus of classic poetry as we meet it, especially in Homer and Virgil. There was at that time a lively discussion going on in England and France as to whether classic or modern poetry ought to be preferred, and both views had their eager advocates and opponents. Holberg, as you may easily imagine, sided with the defenders of modern literature, partly because, being a true son of the age to which he belonged, he was as indifferent to the fresh originality of Homer as he was untouched by the high-sounding imitation of Virgil, and in his poem he mixes them up in a most disrespectful way.

What is considerably more important to us than the form of his poem is, however, the substance of it. The former belongs to the taste of an age which has disappeared long ago; the latter is—as I have already suggested—a cultural portrait of contemporary Denmark, and at the same time a marvellous gallery full of human characters, stamped by the eternal mark of life itself. Holberg, like Hamlet, was of opinion that there was “something rotten in the state of Denmark,” and he made up his mind to set her right by the sound cure of irony. He could have chosen no better remedy; for, in fact, the



community in which he found himself was not disgraced by vices which preyed on the very pith of the nation and endangered its future. The chief fault with it was that owing to a development which forms a highly-interesting chapter in the cultural history of the country—but which it would take too long to detail—Denmark, as Holberg found her two centuries ago, was about to be stifled by an atmosphere of pedantry, humbug, hypocrisy and unsound ambition. Surrounded by laws and orders in council which interfered with their daily life in the most foolish way and increased the number of misdemeanants, the Danish people was about to lose its self-respect and absorb itself in an indiscriminate imitation of foreign nations. Holberg's keen glance pierced through all this foolery into the very depth of the national character. He saw that the Danish people was sound at the core, and he therefore merrily divested it of one piece of these masquerade garments after the other. He wanted to show the people among which he lived that life is truth, not humbug, and that instead of the comfortable advice : Disguise! hide! there is the more noble appeal : Be thyself, and fear not!

There is a whole literature on *Peder Paars* in Norwegian and Danish, and it is only fair to say that opinions of the critics vary as to the intrinsic value of the different parts of the poem from a literary point of view. On the other hand, full credit is given to the poem from a cultural standpoint. Generally speaking, *Peder Paars* is not only the first dazzling display of Holberg's genius as a humorous and satirical writer; it also reveals him as the future playwright, who within a few years was to send pit, boxes and galleries into fits of laughter.

Indeed, we may ask the question : Was there ever in any country a professor of metaphysics with so adequate a store of humour and with a more irresistible fancy to display it ?



## IV.

Holberg as a dramatic author is certainly one of the most interesting chapters in the history of Norwegian and Danish literature, and none has been subjected to a more searching examination.

It is admitted by all critics that he is indebted to the famous playwrights of ancient Rome—Plautus and Terentius—and he certainly also owes something to the Italian comedy with which he had become acquainted both in Italy and in Paris. His relation to Molière whom he admired very much has been a matter of discussion, even in France, and there are in some of his plays characters and scenes which remind one of the English dramatists of the Restoration. But he never stooped to mere imitation. The comedies which have established his fame all bear the indelible stamp of his originality and of his genius.

Let us take a short review of some of the most famous of his comedies.

First you make the acquaintance of the *Tinker Politician*—a typical representative of the time, so occupied with speculations and discussions on public affairs that he has no time to look after his own trade. It consequently goes from bad to worse. He is the central figure in a self-appointed board of Blue-Apron Politicians—a saddler, a cutler, a wig-maker, and so on. They are over head and ears in politics, discussing the events of the Spanish War of Succession, giving advice to Prince Eugène and the Duke of Marlborough or denouncing their dispositions, while expounding the most startling historical theories and making the most absurd geographical assertions. They are also eagerly taking down their own authorities.

Holberg has been so cautious as to make Hamburg the scene of his comedy, for it would certainly not have been tolerated if the action had been made to take place at Copenhagen. Some of the remarks made by the characters of the play have, therefore, retained a wonderful actuality. By



way of example : "Indeed, those people don't see what is to the true benefit of Germany." Replacing the word Germany by the word Denmark we see, however, the homely, eighteenth-century address quite clearly.

In the third act the *Tinker Politician* is most unexpectedly appointed Burgomaster of Hamburg—a sham appointment, of course, arranged by some persons who wish to play a practical joke on him in order to put his remarkable political qualities and his much-boasted administrative faculties to the test. It need hardly be said that his burgomastership which, by the way, only lasts twenty-four hours, filled up with constant embarrassments, disillusionments and mortifications, finally turns out a complete failure. He is just about to hang himself in a fit of despair when he is informed of the joke which has been played upon him. He rejoices in his good luck, denounces his political vanity in a verse which has become classic, and the moral of which may be expressed in the old proverb : "The shoemaker should stick to his last."

In another play we meet *Jean de France*, a Copenhagen cousin of *The Gentleman Dancing Master*, as Wycherly presents him in one of his wittiest plays. His name is Hans Frandsen, a Danish family name—plain and unpretentious. But Hans has been ten weeks in Paris and has returned with his name translated. He mixes his Danish with French words and phrases in the most ridiculous way, trespassing against all the rules of French Grammar. He quite impresses his father and mother by his high-sounding name, his Parisian manners, and his *air de grand seigneur*, but his would-be father-in-law informs him very plainly that he is an old-fashioned Danish citizen who means to stand no nonsense, and who will never give his daughter to a fool. Through a practical joke played upon Jean de France by means of the clever maid servant, who pretends to have left Paris for Copenhagen with the sole purpose of seeing him and enjoying his company, his ridiculousness is so amply proved that he ultimately resolves to shake off the dust of Denmark from his feet and return to fair France. The moral of the play may be



expressed in the old saying : All is not gold that glitters—and the substance of it is to serve as a warning against the bad custom of the time of sending young people abroad before they have developed the necessary amount of self-knowledge and commonsense to profit by their stay.

In *Jacob von Thyboe or The Bragging Soldier*, we meet a highly-developed specimen of "the military fool." I think this comedy stands out as one of the most daring attacks in any literature on the military profession. It is a picture of early eighteenth-century militarism in its worst form, redeemed by no sympathetic feature, the Danish army being at that time practically flooded by German officers, bragging and swearing, mixing German and Danish in the most horrible way, scolding and flogging their soldiers, but at the emergency cowards, eager to save their skins.

As a matter of course, Holberg also introduces to us what we may call "the Latin fool." His name is *Erasmus Montanus*—an unsurpassable translation of the plain Danish name, Rasmus Berg. He exhibits his learning as a constant display of paradoxes and gives only one evidence of sound judgment and insight. Erasmus is capable of proving that his mother is a stone, because a stone cannot fly, nor can his mother; but as the poor peasant woman gets afraid of this astounding metamorphosis and already thinks her legs are turning cold, he graciously comforts her by the assurance that she can think and speak, which a stone cannot. "Consequently you are no stone, mother!" He can also prove by several arguments that children are entitled to thrash their old parents, one of the arguments being that you have to restore what has been bestowed upon you. It serves him right when the whole parish finally rises against him, not because of all these foolish assertions, but because of the only theory in which he is perfectly right, and which he proves by fair arguments, that of the earth being round. On this point he has to give in and admit that the earth is flat like a pancake—the only condition on which the father of his sweetheart will give his consent to the marriage.

In the *Lying-in Room*, a most curious portrait of contem-



porary customs and manners in connection with such a daily event as the birth of a child—we find ourselves in a female gallery, unsurpassed in any literature for variety, liveliness and realism. It might be worthy of a whole lecture on what would certainly prove a highly interesting subject: Holberg and the Fair Sex.

May I finally mention as perhaps the most deeply human of all his comedies, *Jeppe on the Hill* or *The Transformed Peasant*. It is a representation of a practical joke played on a poor peasant who is found in a field near the high road, senselessly intoxicated. He is subsequently brought to the mansion, put into his lordship's bed and garbed with his lordship's finest nightshirt. He awakes and believes himself in Paradise, is treated as a Lord by the real owner of the mansion whose sham servility makes him behave himself insolently, and is once more intoxicated and replaced where he was found in his old dirty clothes. He is then accused of intrusion and violent behaviour at the mansion, sentenced formally to death, and subjected, when asleep, under the influence of a drug, to a sham execution, the rope being fastened under his arms instead of round his neck. He is finally lowered from the gallows, and brought back to life by the same authorities who have sentenced him to death, after which he is dismissed with a few shillings—and the bitter conviction that he has been treated as a plaything by the Lord of the mansion.

The low social level of the Danish peasantry in Holberg's days which contrasted so unfavourably with the social standing of the Norwegian peasants; the state of drunkenness to which they stooped in consequence of the physical and moral humiliations to which they were subjected, and which they wished to forget; the commonsense and keen power of reflection of which they nevertheless were possessed and to which Holberg has paid the famous tribute: "I never speak with peasants without learning something from them"—all this has combined to make Jeppe perhaps the most famous person in the Holberg gallery, conquering generation after generation by his inexhaustible flow of life.



It has justly been said by the famous Danish poet, Oehlenschlaeger (1779–1850) that if we might imagine that every document and record bearing upon Denmark at the commencement of the eighteenth century suddenly vanished from the earth with the sole exception of Holberg's comedies, it would yet be possible to reconstruct the Danish community of the time on the basis of them. This assertion is no exaggeration, but nevertheless it only contains a half truth.

In their outward appearance Holberg's comedies are Danish—customs and manners, names and scenery being contemporary Danish portraits hailing from Copenhagen or from the province—but from within they are unmistakably Norwegian. In fact, the typical characters of the Holberg gallery are not only his compatriots; they are natives of Bergen like himself. The old-fashioned gentleman, Jeronimus, narrow-minded, but possessed of a solid stock of commonsense which will stand no nonsense from the younger generation; his wife Magdelone, who has some recollections of a merry youth and is not altogether proof against relapses into former extravagances; Henrik, the clever servant with the ever-inventive brain, the champion of the rights of youth; Pernille, the witty chamber-maid, alternately impertinent and obsequious, but always beaming with mirth, sure of a safe, however narrow, escape—every one of them, as well as a number of less important characters, are stamped by their own dear, queer town. You may even meet them in the streets of Bergen to-day. It was not therefore by chance that the national stage of Norway was founded at Bergen in the middle of the nineteenth century. The city in which Holberg was born and in which his persons moved about in life, quite naturally became the birthplace of the Norwegian scenic art, and it is the lasting honour of the actors and actresses of the *Bergen National Stage*—still the official name of the theatre of the city—to have contributed to build up a Holberg tradition, which has been further developed by actors and actresses from other parts of the country, chiefly at the Christiania Theatre and its artistic heir the National Theatre at Christiania.



## V.

In 1728 Copenhagen was devastated by a fire, the extent of which, comparatively speaking, can only be likened to the famous fire of London sixty-two years earlier, to which I have already made a reference. In its consequences, it was even more far-reaching. It closes a chapter of high political and cultural interest in the history of the Dano-Norwegian monarchy, and opens a new one, imbued with an entirely different spirit, the characteristic features of which were Pietism and Germanism. Denmark, and more especially Copenhagen, became an intellectual province of Germany, customs and manners being stamped by the new religious movement, and ordinary life surrounded by a serenity which closed the door on all pleasures and enjoyments. It goes without saying that theatrical performances were considered most sinful, and that, even if the national stage had not had to go into bankruptcy some years before the fire, playgoing would have been promptly forbidden along with balls, masquerades, and other public and private entertainments.

Under these circumstances Holberg who, not long ago had published his autobiography as a sort of apology—a literary event which, for various reasons, has been very much discussed by Holberg students—had to give up his activity as a playwright and turn to a work more in conformity with his position as a professor in the University of Copenhagen. But before he did so, he felt it his duty to inform the public that he was the author of the comedies which had hitherto appeared under the fictitious name of a citizen of a provincial town. He certainly did not tell the public anything new by this information, but he impressed it favourably and, what is more important still, he has profited by it in the eyes of posterity. We are pleased to learn, through the authority of Holberg himself on the eve of his long silence as a playwright, that he admits the authorship of his immortal comedies.



in face of enemies whose machinations might have overthrown him from behind, if he had not turned round to meet them and confronted them with an open visage.

In 1730 Holberg was appointed Professor of History, and for the next sixteen years, covering the whole of the reign of Christian VI., he displays the activity of an historian, an essayist, and a philosophical writer—another proof of the remarkable versatility of his genius. Within recent years this phase of Holberg's authorship has been subjected to a close and interesting examination, especially by Norwegian Holberg students, and many valuable features, adding to the correctness of Holberg's portrait as an author and as a man, have been established beyond doubt. His historical works, obsolete though they are and superseded by modern contributions, are imbued with the same spirit as *Peder Paars* and the *Comedies*. In his *History of Denmark* (I.-III.) his greatest and most mature work; in his *Description of Denmark and Norway*; in his *Description of Bergen*; in his *General History of the Church*; in his *History of Heroes* and in his *History of Heroines*, to mention only the most important historical works of this part of his life, in all of them we discover the same qualities which struck us as characteristic features in his first work, deepened by his experiences and sharpened by his superior faculty of observation. In particular, we notice the light thread of irony running through the whole tissue of his reflection and composition, stamping argument and style alike by the irresistible humour of his genius. It is as if the playwright is constantly casting a glance on the manuscript over the shoulder of the historian, and as if merry Thalia always takes a fancy to tease her serene sister Kalliope.

In the midst of his learned studies Holberg, in a relapse, as it were, to his former satirical humour, surprised the public by a work which very soon got international reputation. It appeared at Leipzig in 1741, in Latin, under the title of *Nicolai Klimii Iter Subterraneum*, and was promptly translated into a number of European languages, among them English. The first English translation of *Niels Klim* dates



from 1742; the next from 1828.<sup>1</sup> It ought to reappear in a new translation, and be included among the World's Classics, for next to *Gulliver's Travels* there is hardly a work in any literature to which it can be adequately compared.

Niels Klim is a Norwegian student—from Bergen, of course—who, after having taken his degrees at the University of Copenhagen, both in theology and philosophy, has “returned penniless from the temple of the Muses, like all other Norwegian students.” Strolling about one day among the hills which surround the city, he comes across a big cavern, remarkable “from time immemorial” for a continual groaning caused by the circulation of the air which is being drawn into the hole and again expelled. He makes up his mind to investigate the phenomenon and a few days later, assisted by four labourers, with rope and boat-hooks he makes his descent, being lowered gently down the centre of the hole. Unfortunately the rope suddenly snaps when he is only 12 feet down, and in the midst of a thick darkness Mr. Klim, with tremendous rapidity, falls straight through the globe until he ultimately finds himself perfectly unhurt on another planet. He is startled at discovering that the inhabitants of the country, the name of which is *Potu*, are walking trees, moving about with an extreme slowness and gravity. He afterwards finds out that the mental qualities of the Potuites are in every respect in conformity with their outward appearance.

*Potu* is England, as Holberg saw it—and wished to see it—and in the local description of it we quickly discover scenes of an unmistakable English kind. The Potuites are possessed of a highly conservative temper, but at the same time they are imbued with a true liberal spirit, which makes their institutions, customs and manners—in short, their community as a whole—contrast favourably with the communities of contemporary Europe.

In *Potu* there are no religious quarrels, because the whole creed of the population is contained in a few, easily in-

<sup>1</sup> The complete title of the later translation is : *Journey to the World Underground, Being the subterraneous Travel of Niels Klim.* Translated from the Latin of Lewis Holberg, London. Published by Thomas North, 68 Paternoster Row, 1828.



telligible, and very concise sentences. There are no "suffragettes" either, to use a modern term, for the women enjoy all the rights which among the European nations, are bestowed upon men alone. A highly esteemed widow holds the office of Minister of Finance; an elderly unmarried lady is Chief Justice—both to the perfect satisfaction of their compatriots. The sciences taught at the academies of Potu are History, Economy, Mathematics and Jurisprudence. Medicine is considered superfluous, as an academic science, owing to the temperate and regular habits of the Potuites, while Metaphysics is strictly prohibited, those inclined to such studies being promptly banished to the interior of the firmament. The government of Potu is based upon the principles of absolutism, but as the Princes always rule strictly in accordance with the principle of justice and there is a perfect equality among the citizens—all ranks and titles having been abolished centuries ago—the Potuites are very pleased with the state of public affairs and do not want any change. It is not absolutely prohibited to make proposals tending to change the existing conditions, but reformers had better take care before launching their proposals, for if they are deemed futile by the commission appointed to consider them, the schemer is sure to be hanged.

Mr. Klim, who is considered too versatile to hold any office of importance in the Principality of Potu, is vexed to see himself entrusted with the office of a royal courier, for which the Potuites find him excellently fitted owing to his fast legs. In this capacity he travels all over the principality, having a number of remarkable experiences, visiting, among other places, the famous site of learning of Keba, the subterraneous Oxford. Unfortunately, Mr. Klim cannot control his European ambition as a reformer, but owing to his foreign origin and his inexperience, he escapes the gallows and is expelled instead. He subsequently arrives in the Republic of Martinia, the inhabitants of which form the most complete contrast to the Potuites. The Martinians are apes, and in their country, which, as can easily be seen, is meant to be a sort of underground France, everything goes with a tremendous



speed. Proposals and schemes of every kind are flying about; the number of schemers is unlimited; innovations are hailed with rapture, their popularity being always in proportion to their foolishness. Mr. Klim becomes the hero of Martinia and is considered a true benefactor of the nation when he invents the wig, which is promptly adopted by the Martinians. Unfortunately a Martinian lady, the wife of one of the most prominent men of the Republic, falls in love with him, and as he declines her advances, her love is changed into hatred and she gets him banished from the country.

After a series of remarkable adventures Mr. Klim ultimately lands in Quama, the inhabitants of which are human beings at a very low level of civilisation, among whom he appears in the quality of a reformer. In Quama he discovers a highly interesting manuscript, the work of a Quamite, describing his experiences in a European journey. It is a first-rate eighteenth century satire on European conditions and the customs and manners of the principal countries of Europe. Even here Holberg's predilection for England does not fail. The English, I think you will be pleased to learn, are let off most easily. Like his countryman, Peer Gynt, a century later, though under somewhat different conditions, Mr. Klim ultimately is chosen Emperor by the Quamites, but this proves to be too much for him. His ambition very soon passes all reasonable limits and his reign only knows the two alternatives: World-power or Downfall. It need hardly be said that the latter becomes the natural issue, and as a dethroned monarch he has to hide himself in a deep cavern to escape the rage of his embittered subjects, whom he has utterly duped and destroyed. Suddenly he loses his footing and falls with a tremendous rapidity through the earth the opposite way to that by which he arrived on the underground planet. He naturally lands again outside of Bergen and ends his days as a modest parish clerk, although never forgetting that once upon a time he used to be an Underground Emperor.

Niels Klim is, no doubt, the highest revelation of Holberg's genius. We find in it all the humour of *Peder Paars* and the *Comedies*; his sound judgment and his keenness of observa-



tion as an historian ; his broad-mindedness as a philosopher ; his tolerance as a moralist. As a work of fiction, it yields to none in exuberant phantasy, and the imperturbable calmness of the argument and of the style only adds to its worth.

In 1746 the reign of Pietism came to an end on the death of Christian VI. The accession to the throne of his frivolous, intemperate son, Frederick V., whose first wife was a daughter of George II., inaugurated a new era. All gates of enjoyment were at once thrown open. Hymn-books and Bibles were flung away, and people crowded to theatres, masquerades, dancing halls and other entertainments. Holberg's dramatic vein began to flow again after a twenty years' ebb, but the comedies of his closing years can in no way be compared to those which he produced in the hey-day of his life. More valuable to us than these comedies is the series of smaller essays in the form of *Epistles* (five volumes), and *Moral Thoughts* (two volumes), which he wrote in these years along with a number of minor, and we may also say, inferior works. These volumes are still a rich source of information to Holberg students. In none of his works do we get a more intimate personal acquaintance with him. We learn to know him in his modest, lonely, every-day life ; his sympathies and his antipathies ; "the anfractuosities of his mind and of his temper," which were certainly no less obvious than Samuel Johnson's ; his corporal frailties ; his mental recreations. He is, in a certain way, his own Boswell—less obtrusive, however, and, as a consequence, more concise. There is no subject so insignificant that he thinks it below his dignity to discuss it ; there is none so exalted that he refrains from expressing his opinion upon it. He tells us as willingly why he prefers a cat to a dog, and what a real shoemaker ought to know—as he tells us his opinion on God and eternity ; the destination of man and the supposed greatness of the popular heroes of history whom, by the way, he is more inclined to consider as the mischief makers of mankind and the squanderers of its economic wealth. Through the whole of this wonderful collection of essays we breathe what Hamlet would call "the eager and the nipping air" of originality, invigorating by its draught of commonsense and moral re-



sponsibility. We easily forgive him that some of his views are obsolete, for in other respects he is far ahead of his time, and by his unbiassed attitude leaves even the most advanced spirits of his age behind him.

How splendidly—only to mention one example—he is able to grasp a character like that of Cromwell! At a time when Cromwell was generally considered one of the most abominable personalities in history and a disgrace to his nation; when Hume and Voltaire vied with each other in misunderstanding him, both being of opinion that Cromwell's character was broadly that of a shrewd and daring hypocrite,<sup>1</sup> Holberg was no less convinced of the true genius of the Protector than of his personal good faith and of his patriotic ambition.

"The greatest gifts of nature," he says, "every one of which would make a man prominent in comparison with others were, to an equal degree, concentrated in Cromwell. He seems to have received something from all nations, for one saw in him Italian shrewdness and cunning, French swiftness, English courage and Spanish firmness. He founded his fabric with cunning; he puts his machine in action with rapidity; by his courage he was victorious everywhere. . . . It may be said that his wonderful deeds and his great name were sufficient to keep his internal and external enemies in subjection, for as he was hated by all, so he was also admired by all. . . . Cromwell ranks with those few men whom nature seems to have exhausted herself in moulding."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Voltaire, in his *Siecle de Louis XIV.*, Chap. II (1752), says: "Cromwell . . . portant l'Evangile dans une main, l'épee dans l'autre, le masque de religion sur le visage . . . couvrit des qualités d'un grand roi tous les crimes d'un usurpateur." In his *Essai sur les Moeurs*, Chap. clxxxi. (1757), Voltaire speaks of Cromwell as a man who "parvint à se faire roi sous un autre nom par sa valeur, secondée de son hypocrisie." Hume, in his *History of England*, Chap. lx. (1754) describes Cromwell as a man who, "transported to a degree of madness with religious ecstasies, never forgot the purposes to which they might serve . . . secretly paving the way by artifice and courage to his own unlimited authority."

<sup>2</sup> The essay, from which the above is a quotation, was published for the first time in English in the *English Historical Review*, vol. xxxii., page 412-415 (1917), with an introduction by Mr. R. Laache, M.A., Christiania.



I think you will admit that this is an extraordinary tribute to the memory of the Protector, considering that it was written in 1749 by a loyal subject of an absolute monarch, who had to weigh his words carefully when speaking about a regicide. Anyhow, Holberg's essay is the first scientific rehabilitation of Cromwell before Carlyle.

Five years later—energetic and active as ever and, above all, remarkably receptive to the new ideas of the time, and eager to subject them to a close examination—Holberg quietly breathed his last. He died on January 28th, 1754, at the age of 69, in his city residence at Copenhagen. Lonely as he had been in life, his death was barely noticed, and a few years later one of his more intelligent contemporaries remarks with regret, that he seems to be almost entirely forgotten. Holberg certainly did not expect anything in the way of public mourning and official obsequies on the part of the community in which he felt himself an alien, and upon the mind of which the greatness of his lifework had not yet dawned; but even what may be called the decorum of indifference was absent on this occasion.

Yet time has brought its revenge. Before the expiration of the eighteenth century Holberg's work was in a fair way to being acknowledged. From the 'thirties of last century it rose rapidly in esteem. The bi-centenary jubilee of his birth, which was celebrated all over Norway and Denmark on December 3rd, 1884, gave a lasting impetus to his fame. His commanding position in literature was established for all time.

In his article on Holberg in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Vol. XIII.), Mr. Edmund Gosse justly says: "Holberg was, with the exception of Voltaire, the first writer in Europe in two generations. Neither Pope nor Swift, who perhaps exceeded him in particular branches of literature, approached him in range of genius or in encyclopaedic versatility. Holberg found Denmark"—Mr. Gosse might have added *and Norway*—"without books. He wrote a library for her" (*i.e., them*) . . . "He filled the shelves of the citizens with works in their own tongue . . . all written in a true and



manly style and representing the extreme attainment of European culture at the moment."

In this appreciation we all heartily agree. Therefore, wherever you go in Denmark and Norway Holberg's name is familiar. Words and sayings of his live on the lips of both nations as colloquial terms. He sits in bronze in an arm-chair outside the main entrance of the Royal Theatre at Copenhagen; his noble sepulchre is at Soroe, a dreaming little site of learning in Zealand. He looks down from his pedestal upon the busy life of the Bergen fishmarket, leaning upon his walking stick as if he was about to make a remark. Over the portico of the National Theatre at Christiania, facing the square, his name is inscribed in golden letters between those of Ibsen and Björnson. It is the ambition of all comic actors in Norway and Denmark to appear in one of the chief characters of his immortal gallery. He is in high favour with the public, who applaud him with mirth and laughter; he is the pride of his townsmen, who cherish his memory in a special *Holberg Club*. And in the silent libraries students carefully turn over the leaves of his works to find out new aspects of his genius and of his personality. In fact, the Holberg literature is increasing year by year.

Yet there is one thing wanting. He must be better known abroad, especially in this country. He must become one of the world's classics and find his way to the book-shelves of British homes.

More than seventy years ago *Welhaven*, one of the greatest Norwegian poets of the nineteenth century, in a noble poem summed up the position of Holberg and our obligation to him in a verse which may be rendered thus in English :

*And therefore, like a gem with precious gleam,  
His name shall live in high and old esteem,  
And Northern men with tender care shall save  
His noble image from oblivion's grave.*

I have only a few words to add to these stanzas. Just as we Norwegians have learnt to look upon Ludvig Holberg—in no other light we want you English to see him. He is one



of the highest revelations of the Spirit of the West and, at the same time, the most precious link in the ancient chain of sympathy between England and Norway.



## HOLBERG LITERATURE AND HOLBERG STUDENTS.

### (BRIEF SUMMARY.)

Notwithstanding the many highly interesting works both in Norwegian and Danish bearing upon the importance and the position of Holberg, no complete *Life of Holberg* has as yet been written in either language. We are entitled to ask the question : Will there ever be an adequate one ?

As far as Norway is concerned, the most important Holberg students of the nineteenth century are : Olaf Skavlan (1838-1891); Ludvig Daae (1834-1910), and J. E. Sars (1835-1917), all of whom were professors in the University of Christiania. In the same connection may be mentioned Henrik Jæger (1854-1895), the author of the well-known *Illustreret Norsk Literaturhistorie*, in the first volume of which there is a valuable outline of Holberg's life and works along with a short reference to the Holberg literature (down to 1896), not only in the Norwegian, Danish and Swedish languages, but also in German.

Among the Norwegian Holberg students of to-day, Mr. Viljam Olsvig, M.A., holds the most conspicuous place. In a number of works published within the last twenty odd years, largely bearing upon the connection between Holberg and England, he may fairly be said to have given a new impetus, and even a new turn, to the study of Holberg. Messrs. Francis Bull, Ph.D., and Sigurd Höst, M.A., have, within the last few years, thrown new light on Holberg as an historian; at the same time, the Rev. Ludvig Selmer has subjected Holberg's moral and religious conception of life to a close and interesting examination. Messrs. Just Bing, Ph.D., and Nordahl Olsen, a Bergen editor, have added valuable information to our former knowledge of Holberg in connection with his native town.

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